



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
LANSING

GLORIA J. JEFF
DIRECTOR

March 4, 2005

Mr. Thomas Sullivan, Chairman
Latson Road Interchange Coalition
123 East Washington
Howell, Michigan 48843

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

I would like to thank you and the group of local citizens and elected officials that took the time to meet with me on December 14, 2004, to talk about the status of the proposed I-96/Latson Road project. In addition, I appreciate the information that your group put together regarding the changes that have occurred within the county and the options available for advancing this project.

I have given this issue careful consideration. Clearly the growth that has occurred within the county has been substantial. To that end, the department has been investing in projects throughout the county that will improve mobility. As you are aware, we have recently completed the redesign of the US-23/M-59 interchange. Environmental clearance for the widening of M-59 from I-96 to US-23 is now complete. The design for the widening of this corridor is underway and we have been acquiring the necessary right of way for a number of years. These activities will continue in 2005. When funding becomes available, we will also look to resume the environmental clearance and design phases for the widening of US-23 from I-96 to M-14 in Washtenaw County. In total, these project commitments approach \$200 million.

To date, the department has met our commitments at I-96/Latson Road. Environmental clearance and design have been completed by the department. Those were our stated commitments within the current and previous Five Year Programs. However, project phases for similar jobs statewide have been deferred to provide additional funding for projects designed to improve the condition of trunkline roads and bridges. Currently, in excess of \$600 million of project phases remain deferred. We have been working for several years toward a system condition goal of 90 percent "good" condition by 2007. This has left little funding for transportation improvements, such as new interchanges or trunkline widening projects. Therefore, I cannot recommend that additional federal or state transportation dollars be allocated to the further development of the Latson Road project at this time.

Mr. Thomas Sullivan

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In reviewing the alternatives you provided for the advancement of the I-96/Latson Road project, I offer the following: If local funds are identified for the acquisition of right-of-way and construction of a bridge over I-96 at Latson Road, including the necessary local road improvements, I will offer the Michigan Department of Transportation's assistance to ensure that the project is constructed to appropriate standards. This will improve the north-south mobility issue that you note within your Option 2. In addition, the local acquisition of necessary right-of-way can continue consistent with design plans completed to date.

I hope you find this alternative acceptable and I look forward to working with you regarding this and other transportation issues in Livingston County. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me or Mr. Mark Chaput, University Region Engineer, at 517-750-0401.

Sincerely,



for Gloria J. Jeff
Director



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State stymies Latsen interchange Despite prospect of federal funds, MDOT says it will defer project

By Dan Meister
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Even as more federal money was nearing availability for a proposed interchange at Latsen Road and Interstate 96, state transportation officials said, the project shouldn't be funded.

A letter from Gloria Jeff, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation, to citizens group, the Latsen Road Interchange Coalition, said

the department already has deferred similar projects around the state, and that more state money would not be forthcoming.



U.S. Rep

Mike Rogers

in writing to the coalition's

desire to have the interchange built.

"We have been working for several years toward a system condition goal of 90 percent 'good' condition by 2007," Jeff wrote, referring to the state effort to repair existing roads. "This has left little funding for transportation improvements, such as new interchanges. Therefore, I cannot recommend that additional federal or state transportation dollars be allocated to the further development of the Latsen Road project at this time."

Pat Convery, head of the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce and a member of the interchange coalition, said she wanted clarification on whether a possible \$6 million of federal money — requested by U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton — could be spent on the project.

"Before I say I'm disappointed, I want to learn a little more about what funding could be used," Convery said.

A massive highway spending bill was approved by the U.S.

House of Representatives Thursday, which included the \$6 million.

Mike Craine, managing director of the Livingston County Road Commission, said the federal money could still be used at the site, perhaps for a sealed down version of the interchange.

In her letter, Jeff expressed some support for a bridge over the highway.

"If local funds are identified for the acquisition of right-of-way and construction of a bridge

over I-96 at Latsen Road, including the necessary local road improvements, I will offer the Michigan Department of Transportation's assistance to ensure that the project is constructed to appropriate standards," she wrote.

Jeff's letter was signed by Kirk Sienkiewicz, MDOT's chief deputy director.

Craine said the overall message from MDOT has not changed.

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COUNTY

State stymies interchange project

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"They're sticking to their mantra of 'We're here to fix broken pavement, not to build new interchanges,'" he said.

Rogers was sharper in his criticism of MDOT, and blamed Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

"The governor should stop playing partisan politics with Livingston County road money and recognize that the danger to drivers at the I-96 exits at Howell and Brighton must be addressed," he said in a statement. "I find it inconceivable that the governor

would not only waste federal transportation dollars, but also reject longtime community efforts to create safer roadways in Livingston County."

MDOT spokesman Benjamin Kohman said, "We don't leave any federal money on the table," adding that right-of-way acquisition could be funded with the federal money.

"There would be a use for that money in the context of Larson Road," he said. "To talk specifically about what could happen with money that gets earmarked, we really have to see how the bill ends up."

Tom Sullivan, president of Cleary University and head of the interchange coalition, said he was optimistic because the MDOT objections appear to be about funding, not philosophy.

He also questioned exactly what role MDOT has in deciding how federal money is spent.

"Clearly, congressionally directed grants happen, and the allocations are made by Congress, not MDOT," he said. "I'm still optimistic."

The \$284 billion federal road funding bill was approved by a 417-9 vote on Thursday.

The White House, in a state-

ment Wednesday, threatened a veto if Congress exceeds the \$284 billion figure. It issued a second veto threat over a provision that would require Congress to reopen the act if it fails by 2009 to change how federal funds are distributed to the states.

The reopening clause would take effect if a 95 percent return of federal gas tax revenue to each state is not achieved. Michigan currently gets an 88-percent return.

A Senate committee is set to take up the bill next week.

—The Associated Press contributed to this report.